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NBA's worst thinks it got better

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NBA

The worst teams may have benefited the most after Wednesday's National Basketball Association draft. In other words, the biggest dogs of last season have reason to hope for the future.

"It's too early to talk about wins and losses," said Dallas player personnel director Keith Grant, whose Mavericks were 13-69 last season. "But we will improve, and improve dramatically."

As expected, the Mavericks took California All-American point guard Jason Kidd with the second pick, then bolstered their backcourt when they chose shooting guard Tony Dumas of Missouri-Kansas City at No. 10.

The Mavs hope the experts are right when they say Kidd is the best point guard to come out of college in years, perhaps since Isiah Thomas in 1981.

"He's a great, great prospect. Not a good one, but a great one," Lakers executive vice president Jerry West said.

The Milwaukee Bucks will take up barking as a rallying cry after selecting Purdue forward Glenn "Big Dog" Robinson with the first pick.

The 6-8 Robinson averaged 30.3 points and 10.1 rebounds last season and was the consensus college player of the year because of his ability to dominate games despite swarms of attention from opponents.

"We felt for our needs, Glenn was the player," said Milwaukee coach Mike Dunleavy. "... He's got a great ability to score. And any team that's in a rebuilding mode needs a player that you think has a chance to be a star in the future."

The Bucks also came up with a prospective center in Pittsburgh's Eric Mobley with the 18th pick.

Next up were the Detroit Pistons, who also won 20 games last season. They also picked up a player they project as a can't-miss star in Duke 6-8 swing man Grant Hill. The Pistons fielded numerous calls in recent weeks from teams wanting to deal for the pick.

"I felt like I was in high school on a recruiting trip," Hill said, describing his interview with the Pistons. "They were the ones who were going to make the decision, not me. But they acted like they were trying to impress me."

Five area players were chosen in the two-round draft. Besides Greg Minor, drafted by the Clippers and traded yesterday to Indiana, those chosen included Louisville's Clifford Rozier and Dwayne Morton (both by Golden State), Kentucky's Rodney Dent (Orlando) and Indiana's Damon Bailey (Indiana).

"My heart just started beating a little," said Dent, whose senior season ended last January with a knee injury. "I've had so many downs and I finally got an up."

His career numbers aren't overwhelming. Dent's scoring average at UK was 7.4, 10.5 his senior season. But his 6-foot-11, 240-pound frame apparently was enough to entice the Magic.

"I feel like it's a dream come true," he said. "I felt my day would come, and it finally came."

Information for this story was also gathered by Staff Writer Michael Grant.

Report says Jordan eyes return to Bulls

Associated Press

CHICAGO — The Chicago Sun-Times, citing an unidentified source, reported that Michael Jordan "has just about decided" to leave the Birmingham Barons when their season ends Sept. 3 and rejoin the Chicago Bulls in time for the start of the National Basketball Association season in October.

Jordan, a nine-time NBA all-star before retiring from basketball last year, is not posting all-star numbers with the Class AA baseball team. He is hitting .197 with 26 RBIs, 29 walks and 73 strikeouts in 268 at-bats this season.

"This has been difficult for Michael," the Sun-Times' source said. "He's been so frustrated that his hitting hasn't clicked consistently ... that he's letting down his teammates. Despite what anyone thinks, Michael always thinks about his team — no matter what team it is — first."

Jordan was traveling with the Barons, a Chicago White Sox farm team, and could not be reached for comment. A spokeswoman for the Bulls denied Wednesday that Jordan's return was imminent, and a spokesman for the Barons said he doubted it, too.

"It goes against everything he's said all season," the Barons spokesman said.

The White Sox have not given up on Jordan's efforts to play baseball, general manager Ron Schueler said.

"Not yet, as long as he doesn't give up," Schueler said. "I think a couple of times, mentally, he has been down. But he fought back, and right now his attitude is real good."

Jordan considered announcing his intentions at the Class AA All-Star Game in Binghamton, N.Y., on July 11, the Sun-Times reported, citing an unidentified source involved with the All-Star Game. But Jordan declined an invitation from Southern League president Jimmy Bragan to play in the game.

Bragan said he invited Jordan to play because he has boosted attendance across the league. Bragan said Jordan declined so he could spend more time with his family.

Graduation rates on steady course

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Graduation rates for NCAA athletes in the second year of Proposition 48 generally kept pace with the gains made in the first year, and females did better than men.

Overall, 57 percent of all athletes graduated of those who enrolled in NCAA Division I schools in the 1987-88 academic year, NCAA statistics indicate, compared with 56 percent of the general student body.

The data includes nearly 300 Division I schools and counts only students who received athletic scholarship aid. A 1987-88 freshman was allowed a six-year degree program.

Athletes also graduated at 57 percent in the first class under the controversial freshman academic eligibility rule known as Prop 48, which had been a jump of five percentage points over the previous year.

Marist and Providence were the only schools that graduated 100 percent of their 1987-88 freshmen.

At the bottom of the list were Tennessee State and five Texas schools. Tennessee State's 13 percent graduation rate was the lowest for the 1987-88 class, followed by North Texas State and Texas Southern at 15 percent, Prairie View A&M and Texas-San Antonio (both 22 percent), and Lamar (24 percent).

Black male athletes graduated at a rate of 43 percent, compared with 33 percent for black male students. Fifty-three percent of black female athletes entering in 1987-88 got their degrees compared to 41 percent for all black female students.

Sixty-seven percent of all female student-athletes graduated, compared with 58 percent of female students in general. Among males athletes, 53 percent graduated compared with 54 percent of all male students.

White male athletes showed a 58 percent graduation rate, one percentage point better than white males in general. The highest rate of graduation belonged to white female athletes — 69 percent, down one percentage point from the previous class.

The Proposition 48 requirements, which include a "C" average in college-preparatory courses as well as minimum scores on college entrance exams, was adopted in 1983 and went into effect with 1986-87 freshmen.

In the two major sports of football and basketball, the lowest graduation rate continues to belong to black male basketball players. Their 1984 rate of 29 percent went to 38 percent in the first Proposition 48 year and to 39 percent in 1987-88.

Forty-four percent of black football players graduated in the 1987-88 class, a rise of one percentage point from 1986-87 and nine percentage points from 1984.

Pacers' fans wanted Bailey

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Market Square Arena. Coach Larry Brown was sitting back chuckling before Thorn read the pick.

Clearly, this is a man — and a franchise — that has earned the right to have some fun with its constituency. This no longer is a team terrified of losing its fan base. Winning has taken care of that.

You come from nowhere to make the Eastern Conference finals, you have some latitude.

Three picks later, with the Pacers due up again, it was time for the little game to end or Pacers general manager Donnie Walsh would have had to answer for inciting a riot.

Celebrating Mexican soccer fans have nothing on jilted Indiana hoops backers.

So again, at 11:03 p.m. EDT, Thorn strode to the podium. Again the cheers swelled (albeit a bit nervously this time). The anticipation bubbled (albeit undercut with the faint sound of axes being sharpened and torches being lit, just in case).

"With the 44th pick in the 1994 NBA draft," Thorn began, "The Indiana Pacers select Damon ..."

And that was pretty much all you could hear. The last name, as it has been for years now, was lost in the hullabaloo.

The Pacers had gained a reprieve — for now. Future boos no doubt await should Bailey get cut or ride the pine. But as of today, William Njoku of Nova Scotia and Damon Bailey of Heltonville, Ind., are teammates.

The Pacers did the right thing.

Up in the stands, Harbrook had long since unfolded his arms, in order to high-five his dad and anybody else around him.

"We was worried," Harbrook said. "We didn't think Bailey was going to get picked."

Harbrook and his dad said they're lifelong Pacers' fans. Would they have remained in the fold if Damon had been snubbed?

"No," Rich Harbrook said. "No. We wouldn't quit.

"We'll definitely be back now. Even if he just sits on the bench, it'll be good to see him on the team."

Ten picks remained, but the Hoosier Dome emptied quickly after the big news. The state could go home, turn out the lights and rest easy.

Damon was still theirs.

Minor happy he's a Pacer

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players in the first year of a new pact cannot be grouped with other parties in a trade. Yesterday marked one calendar year since Richardson signed his contract.

Walsh described Minor as "a hard-nosed player we think can play two (shooting guard) or three (small forward). He doesn't have the range of Piatkowski, but he's a good shooter and we're convinced he can be a pretty good player in the NBA."

Minor, who averaged 13.8 points and 6.1 rebounds last season, played the past two years at shooting guard after starting his college career at forward. He said the Pacers initially want him to back up small forward Derrick McKey, then move into a role at guard behind Reggie Miller and Byron Scott.

"I think they're looking for someone who can slash and create shots, and supposedly I'm that guy," Minor said. "I think I'll fit in well.

"I have the body to bang with guys two or three inches taller for rebounds, and I'm quick enough and strong enough to guard them.

"I love going to the Pacers," he added. "They're one of the uprising teams, and it's close enough to Louisville that my friends can come watch me play."

The Minor-Pacers marriage culminated a whirlwind courtship. He was summoned to Indianapolis late Wednesday morning for a meeting with Pacers officials and a 45-minute afternoon workout for Walsh and coach Larry Brown at Market Square Arena.

"They were really high on me, and they told me they wished me the best of luck and they'd see what they could do," Minor said.

Minor said he expected the Pacers to select him. When they didn't, he thought the San Antonio Spurs would take him at No. 22. The Spurs instead selected Boston College forward Bill Curley.

At that point, Minor said, his disappointment was turning to anger.

"I felt I should have gone higher," he said. "I really had high hopes and I couldn't understand how some of those people were picked before me."

Elmore, who played for the American Basketball Association's New York Nets when Brown was their coach, said he believes Minor and the Pacers are a perfect fit.

"Larry is a great teacher, and Greg will do anything he's asked to do," Elmore said. "He's in a situation where he can learn and will have plenty of time to grow into a prominent role. It's a great opportunity for him."

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